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101708Z May 05

ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	DS-00
	EAP-00	UTED-00	VC-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01
	L-00	VCE-00	AC-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIG-00	OMB-00
	NIMA-00	EPAU-00	PA-00	MCC-00	PM-00	GIWI-00	PRS-00
	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SS-00	TRSE-00	T-00	FMP-00
	BBG-00	EPAE-00	IIP-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00
	G-00	SAS-00	SWCI-00	/001W			

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FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8462
INFO ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

UNCLAS ACCRA 000889

SIPDIS

PLEASE PASS TO AF/RSA ROBERT ZUEHLKE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: EMBASSY GHANA HOSTS LIVELY HUMAN RIGHTS ROUNDTABLE

REF: SECSTATE 31996

1. Summary: Post recently sponsored a human rights roundtable of 18 Ghanaian human rights contacts to seek feedback on the Human Rights and International Religious Freedom Reports and to explain USG human rights priorities. Participants appreciated the reports but thought they painted an overly negative picture. Participants differed in perceptions of corruption in the judiciary and highlighted abuses associated with Christian prayer camps. The Human Rights Report got significant press coverage. End summary.

Overview of Feedback

2. On April 12 post hosted 18 human rights activists, journalists, and members of the police and judiciary to a human rights roundtable to discuss the recently published Human Rights Report (HRR). In advance of the meeting, post had sent each participant a copy of the latest HRR report and International Religious Freedom Report. PolChief began the session with an overview of USG human rights and democracy assistance in Ghana and the history and purpose of our required human rights reporting.

3. Overall, participants praised the HRR report as a useful, comprehensive tool for promoting positive change in human rights. However, many participants felt the report lacked balance. It catalogs Ghana's shortcomings and isolated abuses while failing to focus attention on GOG efforts and NGO programs that promote human rights, they said. Participants also thought the HRR report relies on an overly narrow a definition of human rights. One of the report's critics argued it should focus less on criminal justice abuses, and more on access to health care and education as human rights issues. A gender activist argued that women's issues should be more integrated into all sections of the HRR.

The Judiciary

4. Participants focused much of the discussion on whether our HRR report overstates corruption in the judiciary. Some argued that the perception of corruption is greater than the reality. This is due in part to Supreme Court Chief Justice George Kingsley Acquah's frequent pronouncements against corruption, they said. A senior Ghana police official suggested the lower courts, where disputants and defendants frequently buy their way out of trouble, were responsible for the judiciary's poor image. An appeals court judge argued that corruption is far lower than the public believes because most of his colleagues die in penury and no other public agency is subject to the built-in appeals of the judiciary. There is a serious problem with detentions of inmates never formally charged. These cases may contribute to the public's perception of the judiciary as corrupt, even if the judiciary itself is not be responsible for them, participants stated.

Religion and Human Rights Abuses

5. One NGO representative noted that our report lacked information about Christian prayer camp participants being chained, whipped, beaten and forced to confess to witchcraft.

According to NGO representatives, as many as 100 of these camps are in the Volta Region, and some of the worst offenders are associated with Charismatic churches. A print journalist said the victims at these camps are psychiatric patients or people with mental difficulties. Intimidated residents near urban prayer camps that worship all night will not complain because they may be labeled devils, a human rights journalist said.

16. Another gap in the HRR is coverage of cases in which medical treatment was denied because of religious beliefs. On the day of the roundtable, a surgeon reported that a 14-year-old girl with a tumor growing on the back of her head might die because her father, a member of the Jesus Christ Apostolic Faith Church, refused to seek medical treatment for her based on his religious beliefs. GOG authorities are intervening in the case according to press reports.

17. The HRR and International Religious Freedom reports overemphasized the granting of slave girls to Trokosi priests, roundtable participants said. They agreed that this practice, perhaps Ghana's most publicized alleged abuse associated with religious beliefs, is largely in decline but would be difficult to completely eradicate because of cultural beliefs.

Comment

18. The Human Rights Report received significant press coverage. Three daily newspapers published the whole report on Ghana in serial form. HRR reporting on the political killing of a Northern Region politician in military custody received major media coverage. Roundtable participants had read the reports closely, with notes on the margins, and were eager to speak up in two hours of lively discussion. Some thought the discussion reaffirmed their commitment to human rights. For example, Appeals Court Justice N.S. Gbadegbe stated in the roundtable that "Such meetings reawaken those of us who have responsibilities in this sphere...as I remember the discussions and read through the report, I am able to regain my focus." The free flowing nature of the roundtable debate and the broad representation at the event in itself speaks to Ghana's positive human rights environment. We will factor this feedback into future research and reporting on human rights issues in Ghana.

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